

Ag school shut by strike, animals aren't forgotten

By Walter F. Naedele

PHILADELPHIA — There are no teachers at Saul High these days and no students, but the animals are doing fine.

The cows get milked twice a day; the pigs are rooting around noisily.

Some 100 chickens have died in the last month, but that's because they were eating too well.

The only agricultural public high school in the nation, the Walter Biddle Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences has been blacked out by the five-week-old teachers' strike against the Philadelphia public school system.

It would seem the strike might have hurt Saul more than other schools because, when it hit the teachers and students at Saul, it also hit more than 20 cows, more than 20 sheep, over 200 chickens on the high school's farm, as well as lots of rabbits, gerbils and mice used for laboratory research.

During normal school years, students and teachers had spent parts of their days caring for the animals as part of Saul classwork.

But when the teachers' strike began Sept. 8, the teachers went to the picket lines, the students went home, and the animals had to stick around the farm, across from the main school building on Henry Ave. in the Roxborough section of the city.

Fortunately for the animals, three students are paid year-round to milk the cows and clean their barn, working shifts that get them up before dawn and get them home after dusk.

Usually they fit school work into the time between their barn chores. These days, they are working overtime, caring for all the animals.

The three have gotten a fourth hand, because a June graduate of

Saul has been assigned temporarily as their supervisor, filling the role of the resident farmer who is on strike like the rest of the teachers.

"Because of the strike, there's a lot more that doesn't get done (by the students and teachers)," says Stephen Rippert, the June graduate who has been working a five-day week at Saul, sandwiched around his regular five-day-a-week job caring for laboratory animals at the Upper Merion offices of SmithKline Corp.

So, says Rippert, he and his three workers have had to pick up the slack.

"The classes, the students would do a lot of the work — cleaning up, feeding and changing the bedding on the rabbits and all that, the chicken feeding and taking the manure out."

The paid work, he says, used to be "confined to the barns, taking care of the cows, getting the manure out, the general cleaning up and taking care of the sheep."

But now his crew has to take care of the small stuff, "like the animal lab, to make sure everything is fed and watered and the pens cleaned out. They have gerbils, rats, rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs."

That's besides the 23 cows, four calves and about 25 sheep which his guys normally attend to. The pigs recently had been bought for an annual livestock show in which the high school takes part.

Ralph Bartholomew, principal at Saul, noted that apart from the strike, the worst problem at Saul was the proliferation of laboratory animals, whose numbers are usually kept down through classroom experiments.

"The laboratory animals — the rabbits and such — reproduce so rapidly," Bartholomew said, "we

have a problem about how to get rid of them."

On a recent chilly, blustery afternoon, the cows seemed warm and contented inside the small barn on the ridge, high above Wissahickon creek.

It was the afternoon milking, and two of the four workers were dealing with the tubes of the mechanical milking machine.

The other two workers were in the next room, deep into the worst part of the job, shoveling straw out the door into a truck. The room reeked, because the straw was thick with manure.

Down the slope from the cow barn, pigs rooted in their outside pen, hitting a mechanical feeder with their snouts. On the other side of the pig pen, the sheep lay on the grass, watching the pigs.

On other afternoons, there had been teachers in the pens, working with the animals. And on other afternoons, there had been cows out in the pasture between the barn and where the woods began, and teachers and students working with them, too.

It was a quiet place that afternoon. But the student-workers said most of the work was getting done.

What didn't get done in the early days of the strike was the proper feeding of the 200 chickens on the Saul farm.

Larry Zack, one of the three student-workers, says that when the strike hit, the only feed for the chickens was super-grade grain for fully developed chickens.

The student-workers didn't know about such distinctions, he says,

because their job is to care for the cows and the sheep.

So, Zack says, the not-fully-developed chickens which were fed the grain produced super-grade eggs, rupturing and killing themselves in the process.

"There were 200 chickens," Rippert says, "but we're down to about 95."

Despite the strike, things haven't changed that much at Saul.

The chickens that are left still produce their eggs each day. Normally, the eggs would be sold to whatever members of the Saul faculty wanted them.

These days, the eggs are taken across the road to the administrative offices and, Rippert says, sold to whoever is there.

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USDA increases meat, poultry inspection rates

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On Sunday, Oct. 4, the U.S. Department of Agriculture raised the rates it charges to inspect meat and poultry products to reflect the increased cost of providing these services.

Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said the basic hourly inspection rate would increase from \$13.46 to \$14.64.

Houston also said the overtime rate paid to USDA inspectors would increase from \$16.76 to \$18.12 per hour, and that the costs for laboratory services will go up from \$26.24 to \$27.28 per hour.

Under the Federal Meat and Poultry Inspection Acts, USDA

must assume all inspection costs during routine working hours in all plants producing meat and poultry products for interstate or foreign commerce. However, USDA charges the plant for all mandatory inspection services exceeding 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week.

Houston said the new rates are being implemented on an interim basis — without a formal proposal — because of the immediate need to bring inspection costs in line with expenses starting with the new fiscal year in October.

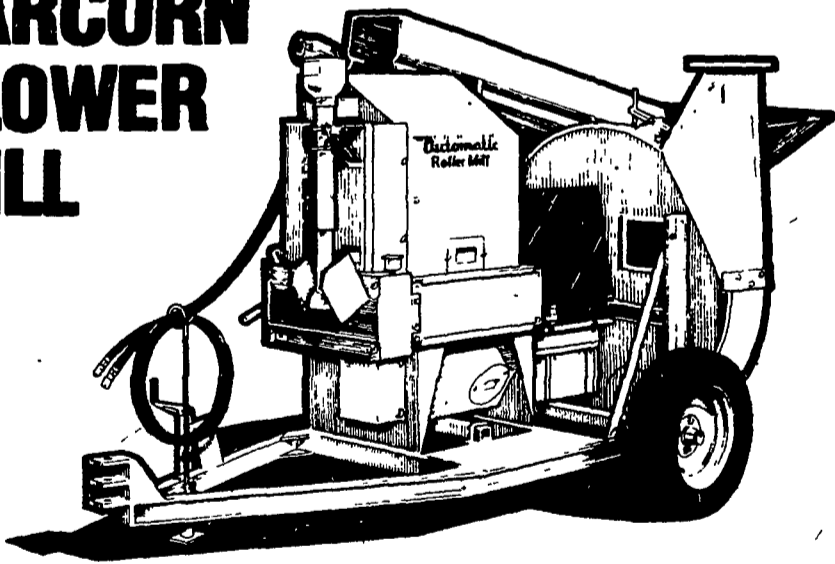
"The interim rule still provides a means for full public participation in the rulemaking process," Houston said.

Notice of the interim rule was published in the Sept. 17 Federal Register, available at many public libraries. Comments, which must be received by Dec. 1, should be sent to: Regulations Coordination Division, FSIS Hearing Clerk, Room 2637, South Agriculture Building, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250.



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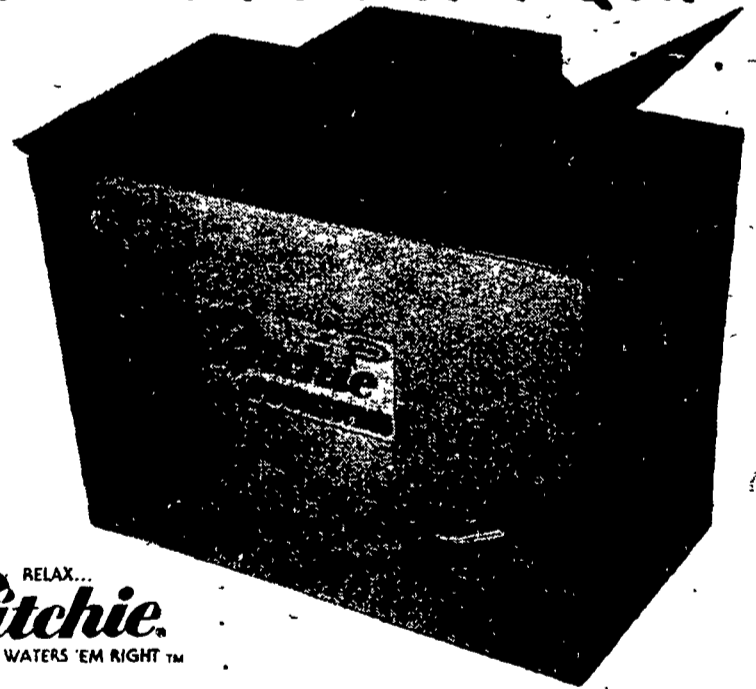
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